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Summer begins and ends with strict enforcement!
Now's a great time to make buckling up a good habit

It's hard to find someone who *doesn't* think buckling up is a good idea. For some, though, it's easier said than done.

Despite advancements in vehicle technology, safety belts remain the single most effective piece of safety equipment. Wearing a safety belt significantly reduces the risk of death or serious injury. And, it only takes a second to fasten a safety belt.

As the travel season begins to heat up, summer will begin and end with all-out efforts to increase safety belt use.

Across Michigan, law enforcement agencies are preparing for an unprecedented enforcement campaign that coincides with the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends to increase safety belt use through high intensity crackdowns on unbuckled motorists.

Hundreds of law enforcement agencies will participate in "safety belt enforcement zones" throughout a two-week period, May 24-June 6, and again August 27-September 12. Each zone will be clearly marked by a portable sign denoting the start of the zone. A special "spotter" will be near the sign looking for unbuckled motorists. That information will be radioed to a team of patrol vehicles assigned to the zone.

Michigan plans to significantly increase the number of agencies conducting safety belt enforcement zones in May, going from 20 counties in November of 2003 to 48 counties this summer.

Motorists are warned this is a "zero tolerance" campaign designed to increase safety belt use through strict enforcement.

Some may ask why an enforcement message is necessary. Nationally, traffic safety advocates agree the single most effective means to increase belt use is through high visibility enforcement. Soft sell campaigns don't change behavior.

Michigan's safety belt use reached a record high in 2003, and now stands at nearly 85 percent. While the increase in belt use is heartening, Michigan has yet to reach the 90 percent mark that western states now boast.

"Is 85 percent good enough?" asks Michael L. Prince, division director of the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP). "No. Not when we know we have the ability to save lives by continuing our push to increase safety belt use."

Should Michigan reach 90 percent belt use, it would be the first state east of California to reach this milestone. More importantly, 90 percent belt use means an estimated 50 fewer traffic deaths every year. That's a life saved nearly every week.

In addition, a higher belt use rate will help eliminate 650 serious injuries and save an estimated \$130 million in economic costs.

OHSP is coordinating efforts to boost the belt use rate. The office is reaching out to state departments, insurers and other health care providers, insurance groups, businesses, associations, and grass-roots organizations to help spread the word.

Materials are available at no charge through the Michigan Resource Center, and include outdoor banners, posters, and flyers. These materials can be ordered by calling 800-626-4636 or visiting www.michiganresourcecenter.org. Additional information is located at the OHSP website: www.michigan.gov/ohsp.

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